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WILDLIFE SERVICES—NEW MEXICO

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in New Mexico

Every day, residents, industries, organizations and agencies call on New Mexico Wildlife Services (WS) for help in protecting agriculture, human health and safety, natural resources, and property from damage or threats posed by wildlife. WS' professional wildlife biologists respond to these requests with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Livestock protection accounts for the majority of WS' management efforts in New Mexico. Rangeland livestock production is a major component of the livestock industry in New Mexico. Rangeland grazing poses a much greater risk of livestock losses to native and feral predators compared with confined feeding operations. To protect New Mexico's livestock industry, WS assists livestock producers with an integrated wildlife damage management strategy.

New Mexico WS also protects planted forage and pastures, field crops, fruits, nuts, turf, and commercial forestry, flowers and landscaping, buildings, roads, bridges, irrigation systems, natural resources, threatened and endangered species, human health and safety, and pets from wildlife threats and damage. WS educates the public about wildlife and wildlife damage management, and provides the citizens of New Mexico with safe, effective, and biologically sound assistance in resolving these wildlife conflicts.

Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock resources from predators
- Protecting crops from damage caused by sandhill cranes and geese
- Protecting crops, pasture land, turf, and human health and safety from prairie dogs
- Protecting crops, pasture land, water control structures, roads and bridges, and trees from beaver damage
- Participating in the Mexican wolf recovery program

Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to New Mexico:

- Identifying individual depredating Mexican wolves
- Managing pecan depredation by crows and ravens
- Managing problems caused by vultures
- Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention strategies
- Improving rodent damage management methods, with emphasis on repellants, barriers, and attractants



Specific projects conducted by New Mexico WS include, protecting endangered southwest willow flycatchers from nest parasitism and lesser prairie chickens, a federal candidate species, from predation; and managing damage caused by beavers, pigeons, starlings, and other wildlife.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology. WS also analyzes the environmental effects of program activities to ensure that there are no significant adverse effects on the environment.

Protecting Agricultural Crops—WS employees working in the middle Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico disperse sandhill cranes and snow geese from crops including alfalfa, chile, and wheat. An integrated wildlife damage management approach is used to reduce damage caused by approximately 30,000 sandhill cranes and 50,000 snow geese. This integrated approach includes the use of lure crops at a nearby Federal wildlife refuge and the selective placement of hunters to reinforce dispersal activities. Cultural practices, including altering planting and watering dates, or planting alternate crops are

also recommended when appropriate. This highly successful cooperative effort between WS, the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, and the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has virtually eliminated all sandhill crane damage in the protected area within the middle Rio Grande Valley. Prior to WS involvement, annual crop losses to sandhill cranes were estimated at over \$100,000. WS efforts have increased landowner tolerance of these valuable wildlife species.

Protecting Livestock—In addition to the many factors that cause economic losses to livestock producers, predators like coyotes, cougars, bobcats, and black bears are responsible for significant losses to some ranchers and farmers by preying on sheep, lambs, cattle, calves, goats, and poultry. The cattle and sheep industry in New Mexico generated more than \$600 million in 2002 and accounted for more than 30 percent of the cash receipts for all agricultural commodities combined. The National Agriculture Statistics Service (2000) reported that throughout New Mexico predators killed 2,800 adult sheep valued at \$227,000 and 7,500 lambs valued at \$338,000 in 1999. In 2000, predators killed 5,700 head of cattle valued at \$2.0 million. Of these, coyotes were responsible for about 75 percent of the losses and mountain lions about 15 percent. Research suggests these losses would be 2 to 3 times higher without a livestock protection program in place. New Mexico WS saves about \$3 to \$4 in losses for every Federal dollar spent on predator damage management.

WS cooperates with State agencies to conduct predator damage management activities in concert with the state's wildlife management goals and objectives. WS also assures environmental impacts are kept to a minimum. For example, although coyotes are the major livestock predator in the State, WS' actions only impact about 5 percent of the coyote population in any 1 year. Accordingly, WS is able to provide livestock protection without significantly affecting the long-term viability of the predator species.

Looking to the Future

Major Cooperators:

- New Mexico Department of Agriculture
- New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
- Taos Soil & Water Conservation District
- 28 County Governments
- 12 Private Livestock Associations
- 5 Predator Boards

Pecan producers in New Mexico face increasing depredation from growing crow and raven populations. In 2002, farmers in the Mesilla Valley of southern New Mexico estimated their losses at approximately 75,000 to 100,000 pounds of pecans. The New Mexico pecan crop generated \$45 million in cash receipts in 2002. WS has obtained a special local needs registration for DRC-1339, a pesticide, in order to assist pecan producers in this limited area, and has assisted farmers with nonlethal methods including harassment.

Coyotes are becoming an increasing problem in urban and suburban areas in New Mexico, killing pets and other domestic animals, and posing safety risks to people and children. WS is being called upon more often to provide advice and direct assistance with these problems.

New Mexico Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and Local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

